



POLICY AND PROCEDURE

NO. 07-01

MONTGOMERY COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE COMMISSION

EFFECTIVE DATE:

6/10/04

TITLE

MEDIA RELATIONS FOR MCFRS

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MONTGOMERY COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE POLICY

MEDIA RELATIONS FOR MCFRS

Issued by: Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Commission
Policy No. 07-01

Authority: Montgomery County Code Section 21-2.(d)(2)
Effective Date: June 10, 2004

SUMMARY: This policy establishes guidelines: to facilitate an effective working relationship between the MCFRS Community Outreach/Public Information Office, media contacts/PIOs representing the Local Fire and Rescue Departments (LFRDs), and the members of the news media; to provide the media with accurate and timely information regarding public emergencies; and to promote public safety education initiatives to the community.

DEADLINES: Div. Fire and Rescue Services Review: December 29, 2003
Div. of Vol. Fire and Rescue Services Review: December 29, 2003
Local Fire and Rescue Departments Review: December 29, 2003
Montgomery County Fire Board Review: December 29, 2003

ADDRESS: Address all comments pertaining to the proposed policy to Beth Feldman, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service, 12th Floor, 101 Monroe Street, Rockville, MD 20850. Comments may also be e-mailed to beth.feldman@montgomerycountymd.gov

STAFF: For additional information, please contact Beth Feldman, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service, on (240) 777-2423

Sec. 1. Purpose: To enhance the effective working relationship between the MCFRS Public Information Officer, the Public Information Officers/designated media contacts of the LFRDs, and members of the print and broadcast news media; and to provide accurate and timely public information regarding major emergencies, significant fire and rescue activities, local fire and rescue community life safety events, and other public safety education initiatives.

Sec. 2. Applicability. This policy applies to all personnel of the Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service.



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Sec. 3. Definitions.

- a. **Local Fire and Rescue Department (LFRD)**. The component of the Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service that provides direct fire suppression, rescue, and emergency medical services, in conjunction with the Division of Fire and Rescue Services.
- b. **LFRD PIO/Designated Media Contact**. The individual designated by a specific LFRD President or Chief to be its focal point and official spokesperson for media inquiries concerning that department's significant fire and rescue activities and public relations activities, who disseminates authorized information to ensure a consistent public information and community outreach effort for that organization. Each LFRD President or Chief must notify the Fire Administrator of the name of its designated PIO/Media Contact.
- c. **Media**. The general term that describes public access information print, electronic (web), and broadcast (radio and television) services.
- d. **Media Hotline**. A taped information telephone message line (240 777-2442), that is updated by the on-duty PIO to provide the current status of the on-duty PIO and/or EMS designee, and their contact information. The hotline is also updated as necessary to provide information on any significant events, or during major incidents.
- e. **Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS)**. The combined service comprising the Division of Fire and Rescue Services and the Division of Volunteer Fire and Rescue Services, which includes the Local Fire and Rescue Departments.
- f. **MCFRS Public Information Officer (PIO)**. The individual designated by the Fire Administrator as the official MCFRS media representative and spokesperson for major emergencies, large-scale incidents, or significant fire and rescue activities. He/she is the focal point for media inquiries, and for discussing MCFRS policy. This individual/office coordinates media services and media relation activities with public information officers and public affairs representatives of other departments and agencies to ensure a consistent and integrated MCFRS community outreach effort.

Sec. 4. Policy. The Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service requires its PIO/ designated media contacts to establish and maintain cooperative working relationships with: members of the news media; federal, State, and local police



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agencies; and other fire/rescue and public safety agencies. **MCFRS** and **LFRD PIOs/designated media contacts** must report to the command post, and provide only accurate, timely, and appropriate information, as released by the command post, to the **media**. They are encouraged to present effective public education and public safety messages whenever possible, and to promote public confidence in **MCFRS** operations and activities. **MCFRS** and **LFRD PIOs/designated media contacts** should make all reasonable efforts to assist **media** representatives to obtain and report accurate, timely, and appropriate information regarding **MCFRS'** involvement at newsworthy incidents, as long as the presence of **media** personnel does not interfere with operations or jeopardize safety.

Only the **MCFRS** and **LFRD PIOs/designated media contacts** are authorized to release official information and appropriately endorsed positions of the **Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service** to the **media**. Statements that are made by any other personnel represent their own personal views, and are not the officially authorized position of the **Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service**. These statements are to be disregarded by the **media**.

- a. **On-Call MCFRS PIO.** A designated **PIO** is on call through the Emergency Communications Center (ECC) supervisor, including during nights and on weekends. The on-call **PIO** is available during non-business hours to **MCFRS** personnel by pager, radio contact, or by telephone. The on-duty EMS supervisor or Safety Officer may assist in coordinating **MCFRS media** coverage on working incidents, when appropriate, in conjunction with the on-call **PIO**.
- b. **ECC Responses.** The news **media's** most frequently requested information about incidents (address or location, time of incident, location, incident type, etc.) can be answered by the ECC supervisor or designee. If an incident occurs before the **Media Hotline** can be updated, ECC supervisory personnel can provide the requested general information to a **media** representative as work load permits. If ECC personnel are uncertain of the propriety of the release of information, they should contact the on-call **PIO** and request him/her to handle the request.
- c. **Notification of MCFRS PIO.** The ECC supervisor or designee must immediately notify the **PIO** of certain newsworthy incidents or events involving **MCFRS** action or personnel, including, but not limited to:

The death/serious injury of a public official;
The death/serious injury of fire/rescue/EMS personnel;



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The death/serious injury of fire/rescue/EMS personnel family member;
The death/serious injury of a County employee;
Natural or man-made disasters resulting in loss of life;
Natural or man-made disaster resulting in significant property loss;
A fire with fatalities;
A fire/EMS incident resulting in serious injury or death;
A fire/EMS incident incurring more than \$10,000 in damages;
An employee/volunteer job action (walkout);
A working structure fire;
Fires with reports of people trapped;
A special alarm requiring additional units (more than 3 units);
A public transportation fire/injury/death (aircraft, railroad, subway, bus);
A Mass Casualty Incident;
An explosive device or suspicious package incident;
A serious/significant Hazardous Materials incident;
A dive incident;
A swift water rescue;
A building/trench collapse;
A confined space rescue;
A fire/rescue-related hate-crime incident;
A major highway/roadway or other transportation network shutdown of greater than 30 minutes duration, particularly during rush hours;
A serious or significant incident of media interest;
Prolonged incidents in which a life safety hazard exists;
Major utility/power failure; and
Extreme weather

- d. **On-scene Media Access.** At an incident scene, **media** representatives must be permitted the same access as any other citizen, and may be permitted closer access than the public. In public places and at other locations where the **media** may legally be present as long as they do not interfere with emergency operations, crime scenes and accidents are usually cordoned off with yellow tape to establish appropriate limits for the news **media**. The **MCFRS PIO**, or others responsible for **media** control, together with **MCFRS'** emergency operations/safety sector and Incident Command, will facilitate **media** access as appropriate.
- e. **Media Contacts, Visits, and Ride-alongs.** The **MCFRS PIO** should be notified of **media** requests to participate in fire and rescue activities that may be used to develop a news story, to ensure that the **PIO** can assist **MCFRS/LFRD** personnel with the **media**, and to effectively respond to the **media** request.



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- f. **Media Coordination at Significant Incidents.** The **MCFRS PIO** will establish and maintain a cooperative relationship with the news **media** to enable them to obtain information, unless that information is legally privileged, or would violate the constitutional rights of an individual, or hinder a criminal investigation. At incidents requiring the assistance of various public safety agencies or other services, the **MCFRS PIO** or designee may release appropriate information regarding **MCFRS** units and personnel. The **MCFRS PIO** takes the lead role in coordinating the release of information to the **media**, in coordination with the affected **LFRD's PIO/designated media contact**, and in conjunction with the County's Office of Public Information and public affairs counterparts from other participating agencies.
- g. Information that may be released by the **MCFRS** and **LFRD PIO/designated media contacts** includes:
1. the location of an emergency incident, time of dispatch, and a general description of the incident type, including conditions upon arrival;
 2. the number of fire/rescue or EMS personnel and units on the scene or involved in mitigating the incident;
 3. the identity of other agencies assisting (Red Cross, public utilities, etc.); and
 4. the number of injured persons and their ages.
 5. Details regarding a fire-related death in the County, whether accidental, natural, or by homicide, may be released only after verifying that the appropriate police agency has notified the victim's next of kin. If notification has been made, it may be appropriate to release the decedent's name, age, home address, occupation (if known), cause and manner of death. The Fire/Explosive Investigations Section must be contacted and permission must be obtained before this information may be released.
 6. Questions regarding the identity of an adult charged with a fire or explosives-related offense, including age, home address, and occupation (if known); charges; circumstances of the arrest (time and place); and bond information should be referred to the Assistant Fire Marshal for Fire and Explosive Investigations.



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(if known); charges; circumstances of the arrest (time and place); and bond information should be referred to the Assistant Fire Marshal for Fire and Explosive Investigations.

7. Charging documents filed with the court are considered public record.

h. **Information that must not be released includes:**

1. investigative or sensitive information from the Office of Internal Affairs or Fire/Explosive Investigations Section, unless authorized by the Fire Administrator or designee;
2. facts that would significantly interfere with an investigation or the apprehension of a suspect;
3. the identity of an arrested juvenile (under 18 years of age), even when charged as an adult. An exception may be made only with the concurrence of the Fire and Explosive Investigations Section;
4. the identity of the specific hospital to which crime victims are being transported;
5. medical information that must remain confidential, as provided for in State and federal law;
6. personnel matters; and
7. other information about which non-disclosure is permitted or required under the Maryland Public Information Act.

- i. **Prohibited disclosures include:** premature release of unverified information; specific facts, circumstances, or details of a situation known only to a suspect, or those under investigation or directly involved with the specific situation.



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Sec. 5. Enforcement. The Fire Administrator is the enforcement authority for all policies and regulations of the **Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service.**

Sec. 6. Effective Date. This policy is effective on June 10, 2004.

Attest:

Gordon Aoyagi, Chairman
Fire and Rescue Commission

Date

APPROVED AS TO FORM AND LEGALITY.

OFFICE OF COUNTY ATTORNEY

BY

DATE

5/24/04

Media relations policy final bf wp 5-24-04